

4-Strap-Design: Important Preventive Step

Band-aids have been around for a long time, they are inexpensive, they work, and they start a healing process. That's the metaphor I used when I started the Roaring Fork Valley Bear Coalition on the Colorado western slopes, and I continue to use it when explaining why this organization uses the 4-Strap-Design to retrofit trash cans. I see the straps as a deterrent and the first step toward getting more bear resistant cans. We have to start small, encouraging everyone to adjust their behaviors around bears.

When I moved to Colorado 22 years ago as a part-time resident, I was excited to participate in recreational and social activities and enjoyed learning about the wildlife in my new ecosystem. It didn't take long to realize I was living in prime black bear habitat, and I began having concerns about human-bear interactions. People seemed unconcerned about how the community and waste management companies dealt with trash issues. Many had little information about bear behavior or habitats. And

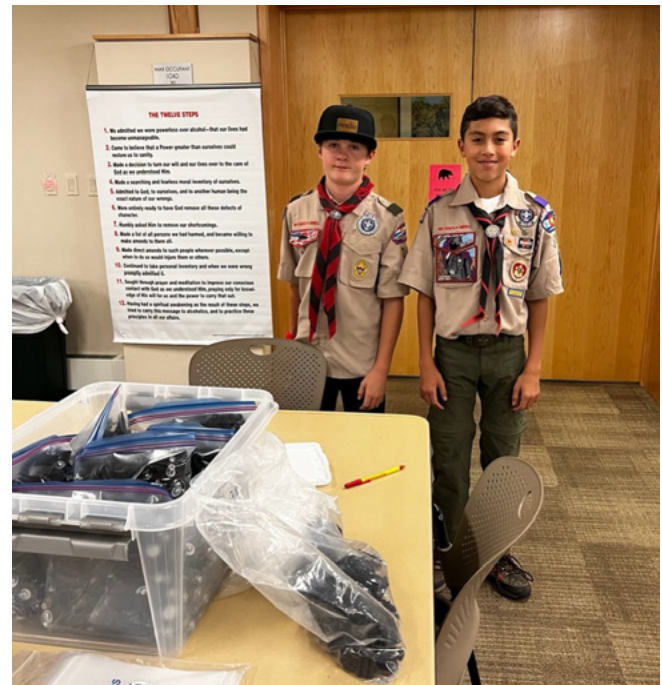


Eagle Scout Court of Honor for Nate Thomas and Nate Balko of BSA Troop 201 Aspen (Nate Thomas made the straps his Eagle Scout Project). Photo credit: Mary-Margaret Tratiak Thomas

I disliked reading news reports about displaced and euthanized bears that had gotten into someone's trash or home.

That's when I decided to take action with boots-on-the-ground checking for unsecured trash lure, birdfeeders, and canvassing different neighborhoods; hardly anyone, of the approximately 32,000 valley residents, owned bear-resistant trash cans. Having worked with a citizen-based bear protection group in Florida that focused on deterring bears from human trash, and raising bear awareness in Seminole County, Florida, I knew there could be good results for both bears and community members. This experience helped me take steps in 2019 to put my knowledge and love for bears to good use and make a difference in my Colorado community. I founded Roaring Fork Valley Bear Coalition (RFVBC), a 501(c)(3)-nonprofit.

Straps work well as a deterrent and first step in less populated human areas. Straps can be equal if not better than carabiners, hatchet clasps, hasp design, bungee cords, rubber bands, or belts. Therefore, our volunteer-based RFVBC started making and using the 4-Strap-Design retrofitting method, a genius invention by fellow wildlife



Boy scouts of BSA Troop 201 Aspen, Connor Anderson, Sheldon Gentry. Photo credit: Daniela Kohl



Lt. Colonel Richard Merritt and Boy Scout Connor Anderson, his father Brett Anderson. Photo credit: Daniela Kohl

advocate, Jim Durocher. His system, tested at the Brevard Zoo by Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission (FWC), is featured on FWC's website as a "modify" option.

RFVBC joined forces with Boy Scouts of America, Troop 201 Aspen to make, distribute, and install the 4-Strap-Design. One of the scouts made this his Eagle Scout Service Project, retrofitting trash cans with RFVBC "Bear Care Kits" in 2019. These kits include 4 trash can straps and bilingual

(English/Spanish) bear aware educational information, stickers, a bear-wise magnet, and bear whistle.

RFVBC grassroots efforts have increased in the small towns, subdivisions, and rural communities of both the Roaring Fork and Grand valleys where free retrofitting of existing trash cans occurs. The volunteer group also supports these communities by canvassing neighborhoods to help clean-up fallen fruit, pumpkins and to distribute free educational materials and retrofit trash cans to reduce human-bear conflicts.

Residents have realized how successful they can be when they learn to be bear aware and they appreciate that the materials and kits are free. Unfortunately, as RFVBC works with people in various towns and subdivisions they have heard complaints about the limited availability of bear resistant cans (BRCs) or the high cost to rent or have serviced BRCs. Many people cannot afford it. Over the years, most waste hauling companies have been very accommodating working with BRCs and systems, like the 4-Strap-Design. In most cases trash workers are happy that they don't have to pick-up trash all over the street because their customers have properly secured their own trash, and the extra seconds it takes to unstrap the straps is minimal. Even with all these efforts and positive steps, sometimes I



RFVBC's "Bear-Care" Kit. Photo credit: Daniela Kohl



Trash can flipped over by bear in Glenwood Springs area.
Photo credit: Daniela Kohl

get frustrated when waste management companies or other bear advocates criticize the 4-Strap-Design with comments like: "It doesn't work"; "It hasn't been tested"; "It's not IGBC certified"; "It slows down trash pick-up"; "We'll need to add a monthly surcharge"; etc. These are difficult to hear, but I know that the strap system works and helps deter the bears. Admittedly it is just a first step, but it is a step that people can afford.

RFVBC's priority is to keep bears out of town and wild with the focus on human safety and wellbeing. The human safety aspect should be a number one priority for all communities, governments and all waste management companies! In fact, RFVBC believes local governments and HOAs should be encouraged to enact ordinances or bylaws, that all customers should receive and use BRCs.

Our goals are simple, aim to work with residents and waste management companies to educate everyone about being more bear aware in their behaviors. RFVBC has even added a disclaimer on their materials that residents must contact trash haulers before retrofitting their own trash cans. Recently, while canvassing neighborhoods, mostly unsecured trash cans or unsuccessful home-made restraints on cans were present. Sadly, most residents simply cannot afford the additional \$25.00 USD monthly fee charged on BRCs.

I know RFVBC is taking small steps, I understand that bear educational material only changes behaviors to a point. But we must start with band-aids, let them work and then more can change. The straps on trash cans are only a step toward getting true BRCs, and are wildlife deterrents. We would



Strap Design-retrofitted trash can. Photo credit: Daniela Kohl

love to see all residents have access to IGBC or WildSafeBC certified cans. The reality is that this is only a wish for most rural small towns in western Colorado where most residents only have access to unsecured trash cans. Thus we seek to offer BRCs at reduced prices to residents who need them. RFVBC invites people to donate generously to the cause.

Until RFVBC can realize their bigger dream, the grassroots group will retrofit trash cans and educate one resident at a time.

Check-out these links:

<https://myfwc.com/media/20202/combined-retrofit-kit-directions.pdf>

<https://youtu.be/KtWtLf5S1ek>

<https://youtu.be/a2qxDHD4Hvo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kb8h6uUgHxQ>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gz_ZvDN3tSs&t=105s



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